

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, October 6, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOME INSPECTION FOR FIRE HAZARDS." Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

A few days ago, the Secretary of Agriculture addressed a message to farm families and home owners generally of the United States, urging them to observe National Fire Prevention Week by having their homes competently inspected for fire hazards. This year National Fire Prevention Week is from October 9 to October 15. Secretary Wallace suggested also that with this good beginning periodic inspections should be made. Many of the thousands of costly and preventable fires on farms, particularly, might thus be prevented.

He pointed out that farm fires represent about one-third of the total fire loss for the whole United States. In 1937, he said, farm fires caused 90 million dollars' property loss, and cost 3500 lives. And 85 percent of this terrific waste can be traced to eight chief causes: Defective chimneys and flues; sparks on combustible roofs; lightning; spontaneous combustion; careless use of matches, and smoking; careless use of kerosene and gasoline; defective and improperly installed stoves and furnaces; faulty wiring and wrong use of electrical appliances.

During National Fire Prevention week this year it is planned that volunteer firemen, representatives of boys' and girls' 4-H Clubs, and rural Boy Scouts will cooperate with various other organizations in each community in making inspection and asking home owners to check over the dangerous spots that need attention. You may have fire hazards you have never noticed, perhaps because certain things have always been done the easiest way, or because no particular thought has been given to fire dangers. In my own case, I know, there's a towel rack altogether too close to the kitchen stove -- it's got to be moved tonight!

Four-H Club boys and girls in many States are being trained to help with home inspection for fire dangers. Typical of this training is the excellent fire prevention manual issued to the Kansas 4-H Club members. I have a copy of it before me. As some of you may not be located where these volunteer groups of inspectors are active this year, you may like to know which points the Manual stresses.

Chimneys. Number one danger on the list, as it is on the eight points mentioned by Secretary Wallace. Every fall before fires are started, chimneys should be thoroughly cleaned, the manual says. A burlap bag containing a little sand, and tied on the end of a chain or wire, can be raised and lowered in the chimney until all the soot collected on the walls has been swept loose.

Chimneys should also be examined for cracks or other defects. Spark arrestors of an approved type may prevent serious roof fires.

Furnaces, stoves, ranges and fireplaces are next discussed. Boilers and furnaces should rest on incombustible foundations. Careful attention should be given to the proper location of all equipment in the house in which fire is actually used. Nearby woodwork such as walls back of stoves, ceiling beams, partitions or other structural features likely to catch fire should be protected with metal sheets. There should be 18 inches between a stovepipe and a ceiling, says the manual, and the pipe should fit tightly where it enters the chimney. A fireplace screen will keep chance sparks from the open fire off rugs and flooring. The wood or coal-burning kitchen range requires at least a 4 inch clearance underneath for circulation of air, and of course should be placed on a metal mat extending in front of it about a foot.

Oil and gasoline stoves present special hazards, not only because they use highly flammable fuel, but also because they are light-weight and easily tipped over or jarred. Portable oil heaters should be kept clean and in good condition and placed well away from curtains and upholstered furniture when in use. If oil lamps are used for lighting it is dangerous to set them on a table covered with a cloth that hangs over the sides. Children have been known to pull at such cloths and tip the lamp over.

Gas stoves should have rigid metal pipe connections, not flexible rubber tubing, which soon becomes worn and leaky. Gas "hot plates" should be used only on a metal tray or metal-topped table. A gas heater of the open-flame type should have a wire guard.

The basement is one of the chief danger places in the house from the fire standpoint. It should be kept free from accumulations of inflammable materials such as paper, old boxes, oily and paint-soaked rags, and trash. If oily rags or floor mops must be stored in the cellar they belong in tightly closed metal containers, but are better hung loosely out-of-doors where air can circulate.

Hot ashes are one of the basement dangers, especially when they are piled up near the supply of wood or put into wooden baskets instead of metal ash cans. Even cobwebs in a cellar can spread a flash of flame suddenly. If a lamp must be used in the basement, a special shelf should be arranged to set it on.

Attics, like basements, get filled up with stored articles. During the summer months the temperature in the attic is higher than the rest of the house. Therefore, nothing should be stored in an attic that is liable to spontaneous combustion. It's best not to store anything close to the chimney.

On the first floor of a home more accidental fires occur than in any part of the house. Special suggestions are: To arrange furniture a sufficient distance from stoves, and so that a clear passageway is left to the doorway. To furnish metal trash and ash containers in each room. To watch electric wiring and cords of appliances for breaks. It is also suggested that home owners think over the personal practices and habits followed in the family, in so far as they affect safety from fire. The dangerous habits should be analyzed to determine which should never be done under any circumstances, and which could be done in a safer way.

#####

